

# Medical compassion at the end-of-life

European Region Meeting on End of life Questions  
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# Medical compassion at the end-of-life

## presentation outline:

- a) “compassion” is not a **reason** at all
- b) “unbearable suffering” is not a **medical** issue

# 1. “compassion” is not a reason

*Cambridge Dictionary*: “a **feeling of sympathy** for people who are suffering”

*Oxford Dictionary*: “**sympathetic pity** and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others”

etymology: Old French from ecclesiastical Latin

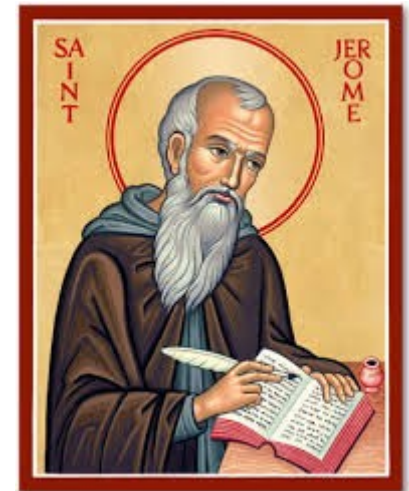
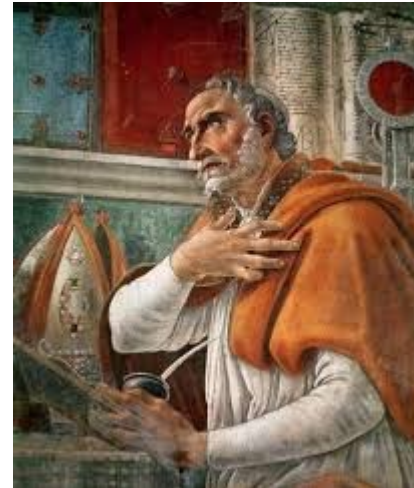
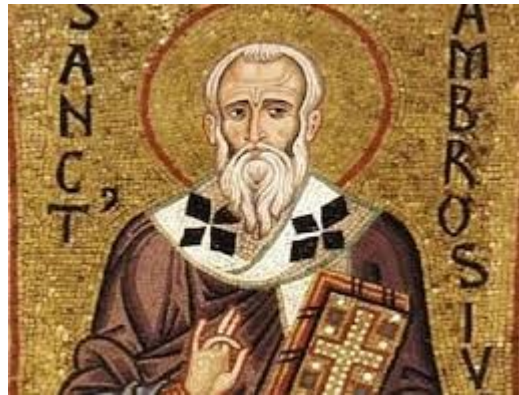
**compassio** (n-)  
**compati** (suffer with)

1. “compassion” is not a reason

**compassio, -onis**



Tertullian (ca. 160 AC)



# 1. “compassion” is not a reason



1. “compassion” is not a reason

“a feeling of sympathy”

“sympathetic pity”

sentiment

NOT

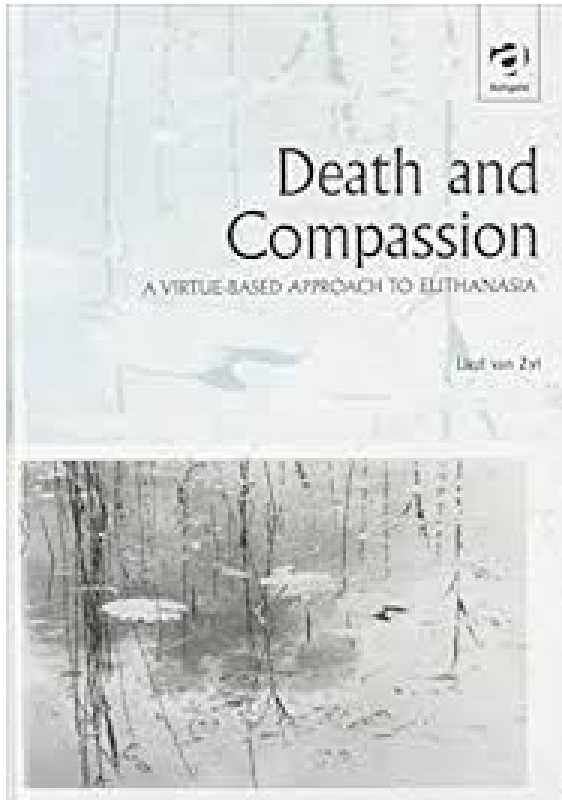
reason

# 1. “compassion” is not a reason



# 1. “compassion” is not a reason

Liezl L. Van Zyl



“Euthanasia, as a last resort, can therefore be justifiable as a compassionate, benevolent, and respectful response to a patient’s suffering”



## 2. “unbearable suffering”

Doctors should do...

neither more  
NOR  
less

## 2. “unbearable suffering”



2. “unbearable suffering”

medicine

human person

health

## 2. “unbearable suffering”



WHAT WE DO

POLICY

PUBLICATIONS

NEWS & PRESS

WHO WE ARE

JUNIOR DOCTORS

MEMBERS' AREA

Policy / Current Policies / WMA Declaration on Principles of Health Care For Sports  
Medicine



# WMA DECLARATION ON PRINCIPLES OF HEALTH CARE FOR SPORTS MEDICINE

*Adopted by the 34<sup>th</sup> World Medical Association General Assembly, Lisbon, Portugal,  
September/October 1981*

*and revised by the 39<sup>th</sup> World Medical Association General Assembly, Madrid, Spain, October  
1987,*

*the 45<sup>th</sup> World Medical Association General Assembly, Budapest, Hungary, October 1993,*

*the 51<sup>st</sup> World Medical Association General Assembly, Tel Aviv, Israel, October 1999,*

*and reaffirmed by the 185<sup>th</sup> WMA Council Session, Evian-les-Bains, France, May 2010*

30th September 1999

Policy Types

Declaration

Tags

## 2. “unbearable suffering”

medicine  
society  
change

- open heart surgery
- euthanasia

## 2. “unbearable suffering”

medicine  
society  
change

- open heart surgery: **improvement**
- euthanasia: **regression**

## 2. “unbearable suffering”

with Hippocratic  
Medicine...

the figure of  
**doctor**  
and  
**sorcerer**  
was separated



## 2. “unbearable suffering”



“I will not give  
a lethal drug  
to anyone  
if I am asked,  
nor will I advise  
such a plan”



# Suffering in the Advanced Cancer Patient: A Definition and Taxonomy

NATHAN I. CHERNY and NESSA COYLE, Pain Service, Department of Neurology, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and KATHLEEN M. FOLEY, Pain Service, Department of Neurology, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and Department of Neurology, Cornell University Medical College, New York, New York, USA

## PATIENT DISTRESS

The physical and psychological symptoms as well as the existential concerns that contribute to patient distress are tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1 / LIST OF FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO PATIENT DISTRESS

### Physical symptoms

- pain
- lack of energy
- feeling drowsy
- dry mouth
- lack of appetite
- nausea
- feeling bloated
- change in the way food tastes
- numbness/tingling in hands/feet
- constipation
- cough
- swelling of arms or legs
- itching
- weight loss
- weight gain
- diarrhea
- dizziness
- problems with sexual interest or activity
- shortness of breath
- vomiting
- problems with urination
- difficulty swallowing

### Psychological symptoms

- anxiety
- depression
- sleep disturbance
- irritability
- impaired concentration
- nightmares
- delirium

### Existential concerns

- disrupted or distorted personal integrity
- changes in body image
- changes in body function
- changes in intellectual function
- changes in social and professional function
- diminished attractiveness as a person
- diminished attractiveness as a sexual partner
- increased dependency
- distress from retrospection
- unfulfilled aspirations
- deprecation of the value of previous achievements
- remorse from unresolved guilt
- distress from future concerns
- separation
- hopelessness
- futility
- meaninglessness
- concern about death
- religious concerns
- illness as a punishment
- fear of divine retribution
- fear of a void

### Empathic suffering with family (Table 2)

#### Distress related to health care services

- communication
- availability
- personal and cultural sensitivity
- excessively candid
- inadequate information
- lack of availability
- lack of services
- exhausted services
- uncommitted services
- ineffectual services
- expense

## 2. “unbearable suffering”

Open Access

Research

### **BMJ Open** Understanding patients’ experiences of the wish to hasten death: an updated and expanded systematic review and meta-ethnography

Andrea Rodríguez-Prat,<sup>1</sup> Albert Balaguer,<sup>2</sup> Andrew Booth,<sup>3</sup> Cristina Monforte-Royo<sup>4</sup>

#### **reasons:**

- a) physical
- b) psychological  
emotional
- c) social factors
- d) the loss of self

#### **meanings:**

- a) a cry for help
- b) to end suffering
- c) to spare others from the burden
- d) to preserve self-determination
- e) a will to live but not in this way

## 2. “unbearable suffering”

Doctors should do...

neither more  
NOR  
less

of the art of healing